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*The FFA Mission: FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth and career success** through agricultural education.*

## **NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION**

June 20, 2011

The Honorable Julius Genachowski  
The Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: A filing for FCC docket 11-65

Dear Chairman Genachowski,

On February 7, 2011, you offered a powerful, insightful testament to broadband's value for many of America's rural communities:

"[There is] a rural-rural divide, where some parts of rural America are fully connected... while other parts of rural America are entirely left behind. This rural-rural digital divide isn't a one-state problem. It's a national problem, affecting Oregon and Maine and most states in between." (*Remarks to the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation in Washington, D.C.*)

The National FFA Organization is dedicated to making a positive difference in America's rural communities. Our focus is on improving the lives of younger Americans by developing their potential for leadership and career success through agricultural education. In its many programs, FFA seeks to increase awareness of the global and technological importance of agriculture. More fundamentally, we promote the intelligent choice of an agricultural career and encourage wise management of economic, environmental and human resources. Over sixty percent of the nation's 523,000 FFA members live in rural communities.

From our perspective, improving the economic health of small towns and rural communities is vitally important to our efforts to help the next generation of America's agriculturalists. We see high-speed Internet service as having a crucial role in this effort. By expanding broadband availability, we can help economically depressed rural communities once again become vibrant places that retain their youth and attract people who want to build their future and raise their families in a rural setting.

Our sincere desire is to see the fastest possible deployment of wireless broadband service across rural America. We support the proposed AT&T - T-Mobile merger, because we believe the combined company will accelerate the deployment of the fastest wireless broadband networks nationwide and expand the opportunities available to rural youth, thereby helping small towns and rural communities hit hard by the economic downturn.

Specifically, we urge the Commission to consider the following ways that faster high-speed Internet service will benefit rural youth and the farming community more broadly:

### **I. BETTER ACCESS TO ONLINE EDUCATION**

The FFA motto gives members twelve words to live by: "Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve." It is no accident that two of the four actions in our motto involve learning. More than ever, education is crucial for agricultural communities, and expanded wireless broadband gives people in rural communities an additional option for accessing distance learning.

This issue is especially important for FFA, as we expand our online education offerings to help the next generation of farmers. Our online education programs include FFA LEARN, a web-based program that provides FFA advisors and their students with hundreds of free lesson plans that cover such issues as risk management and agri-entrepreneurship. FFA has also set up LifeKnowledge Online, which includes more than 250 lesson plans structured to help FFA advisors and teachers prepare middle- and high-school students to become better leaders.

## **II. NEW WAYS TO SAVE TIME AND FUEL COSTS**

Rising fuel costs are a problem for American farmers and their families, and rural broadband is an important solution. In our spread-out rural communities, trips to the nearest town can be 30 miles or more, and travel to the nearest city can be 100 miles or more.

Expanded wireless Internet service in our communities will reduce the need for these trips. Better wireless access means, for example, that our students can do research and communicate on joint homework projects from home, without the need for long car rides to the library or community center. It means avoiding extra trips to the bank because the transaction can be handled through a mobile phone. The spread of high-speed broadband access through computers and smartphones in rural areas is not only tremendously empowering, it has considerable "green" benefits, which are important to rural families as well.

## **III. IMPROVED EFFICIENCY IN AGRICULTURE**

Agricultural producers are increasingly using GPS and wireless networks to map out their fields and pinpoint specific areas for seeding and fertilization. These systems are also useful in identifying problem areas that may result from overseeding or an additional light fertilizer treatment. As members of the Commission may know, the costs of seed and fertilizer are considerable, so measures that reduce their use help farmers' profits. Reducing over-fertilization also has clear environmental benefits. Expanding wireless broadband in rural America could help our farmers adopt wireless communication to improve their efficiency and profitability.

## **IV. THE FUTURE OF THE U.S. AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY**

Most importantly, for the National FFA Organization, rural broadband will energize and inspire our youth to pursue exciting "cutting edge" careers in farming. Today, there are more than a half-million FFA members, aged 12-21, in all 50 states, and nearly 90 percent are in grades 9-12. Our members are highly adept with wireless technology in general and smartphones in particular. They are eager for the opportunities that come as high-speed wireless broadband comes to rural communities. This merger and AT&T's commitment rural broadband can directly impact the quality and number of educational and economic opportunities available to rural youth.

We understand the Commission is conducting a thorough review, as it should. Mergers can be complicated and the public interest deserves a full and fair investigation. The National FFA Organization requests that you consider closely the merits of the AT&T - T-Mobile merger as being in our nation's best interest if it will yield high-speed coverage in rural areas that are critical to the future of our rural youth and the continued success of our country's agricultural industry.

Sincerely,



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